

REMARKS

There are now pending in this application claims 7-14, of which claim 7 is independent. Claims 1-6 have been cancelled without prejudice or waiver of their subject matter, and have been replaced with claims 7-14.

In view of the above newly presented claims and the following remarks, favorable reconsideration and allowance of the above application is respectfully sought.

The invention as now recited in independent claim 7 calls for an image heating apparatus comprising an endless belt, a first rotatable member for rotatively supporting the belt, and a second rotatable member disposed opposed to the first rotatable member with a belt therebetween. The first rotatable member has an elastic layer with an outer diameter which is larger in a longitudinally central portion in opposite longitudinal end portions, and there is included urging means for urging, towards the second rotatable member, opposite ends of a rotational shaft of the first rotatable member. The invention is characterized in that the nip has a width which is larger in the opposite longitudinal end portions than in the longitudinal central portions.

Kurotaka et al. is directed to a belt fixing device and includes a heating roller, a fixing roller, a fixing belt, and a pressure roller. The heating roller and pressure roller have a heater therein. In Kurotaka et al. the pressing roller has an outer diameter of 40-60 mm and a thickness of 0.3-1.5 mm (see, col. 24, lines 57-60).

Tomatsu is directed to a thermal fixing device with a heat roller formed in a reversed arc crown shape or in an arch crown shape, with a pressing roller having a reverse crowing configuration which corresponds to the heat roller.

Neither of the applied references is understood to teach or suggest that aspect of Applicants' invention wherein the first rotatable member which supports the belt has an elastic layer with an outer diameter which is larger in the longitudinal central portion than in opposite longitudinal end portions, with an urging means for urging the ends of a rotational shaft of the first rotatable member toward the second rotatable member, or the feature of the nip having a width which is larger in the opposite longitudinal end portions than in the longitudinal central portion.

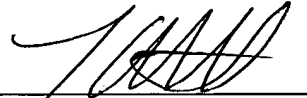
It is therefore respectfully submitted that the invention as now set forth in independent claim 7 is distinguishable over the applied art of record.

Claims 8-14 are dependent claims which depend either directly or indirectly from claim 7 and are therefore patentable over the art of record for reasons noted above with respect to claim 7. In addition, each recite features of the invention still further distinguishing it from the applied art. Favorable and independent consideration thereof is respectfully sought.

Applicants respectfully submit that all outstanding matters in the above application have been addressed and that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the above application is respectfully sought.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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